

## Arizona leads the way to higher pay for COs

Nationwide, corrections officials are lobbying for higher pay for their valued corrections staff members.

In California, corrections officers said the pay would have to quadruple to compensate them adequately for putting up with a ratio of inmates to officers that is sometimes as high as 100 to 1. In addition, recent rioting throughout the system has left corrections staff much shorter than usual.

DOC chiefs in Alabama, Nevada and New York also have petitioned state legislators for additional money for their COs.

But none have lobbied as hard as **Dora Schriro**, director of the **Arizona Department of Corrections**. Arizona taxpayers paid about \$10 million last year to recruit and train corrections officers for the state penal system, but the **Arizona State Prison-Safford** has one of the worst understaffing problems in the state.

Overtime pay to officers added up to \$18.8 million last year. Schriro said the money could be better spent by paying corrections officers and other prison employees, such as program staff and medical personnel, the money they deserve. She believes higher wages and salaries will translate into a higher retention rate of prison employees.

Schriro is not just talking to lawmakers, though. She has begun to travel to communities across the state to raise public awareness and support about the need to pay corrections officers and other prison employees competitive salaries and wages.

Arizona COs earn \$29,014 in their first year, which includes an across-the-board \$1,650 annual pay hike for all state employees. In comparison, first-year COs in Maricopa County earn \$31,179 and \$33,636 in Pima County. Beginning COs with the **Federal Bureau of Prisons** earn \$38,703 in their first year, according to statistics from ADOC.

Currently, 22 percent of the jobs at Arizona's state-run prisons are vacant.

Many employees have left the **Arizona Department of Corrections** for higher-paying jobs in federal prisons or county jails, Schriro said. According to statistics provided by the ADOC, the state employed 5,456 correctional officers in January 2005. In January, the number of officers dropped to 4,880.

"The only way to keep these prisons running is to turn to the staff who haven't quit," Schriro said.

In New York, the commissioner has asked for a 10 percent increase, and in Alabama, former **DOC Secretary Donal Campbell** petitioned heavily for a steep increase in pay for COs. ■